

J. F. Bayard
Mecklenburg's
Declaration of Independence
1882

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1775.

MECKLENBURG'S

1882.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE!

107th ANNIVERSARY.

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SENATOR BAYARD'S GREAT SPEECH!

WITH INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY

SENATORS RANSOM AND VANCE.



Senator M. W. Ransom, by request, read the Declaration, introduced by eloquent and patriotic allusions to the Declaration itself, and to the men who made it, referring in terms highly eulogistic to the distinguished representatives from other States who were present. The Declaration having been read, the Senator made some remarks which were worth their weight in gold. Speaking of the difficulty of proving the Declaration at this remote date he said: "Great truths do not always depend on human testimony—they are like God's light, they live forever, are eternal and stand without question. We stand to-day in the blaze and light of a hundred and seven years of civilization, and a hundred years from now unborn generations will come to kneel at the shrine and pay homage to the altars of liberty erected in Mecklenburg county in 1775—this Bethlehem of the new continent. Nothing can dim its luster. It will shine on and from generation to generation it will be the guiding star of nations in the years which are to come."

After which the orator of the day, Hon. Thos. F. Bayard, of Delaware, was introduced by Senator Z. B. Vance, as follows :

MEN OF MECKLENBURG :—I congratulate you to-day upon this happy occasion which has brought together so many of our people, citizens and strangers, to bear living witness to the virtues and to the patriotism of our forefathers. I rejoice to know that our country and people at large are prosperous and happy, and that they are once more enjoying in peace the divine fruits of that industry which is guided by uprightness. One hundred and seven years ago this day, the foundations of our liberties were laid broad and deep on this spot; and now that through the intervening years of war and peace, of rejoicing and sorrow, through good and through evil report, we have contended earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to us by the fathers, and held fast the form of sound words in which they are embodied, we have met once more to do them honor. We have met to worship once again at

the shrine of American liberty, upon the very spot where it was born. And what happier conjunction of auspicious omens could be found than the fact that the High Priest who is to minister before us to-day, is one of the noblest, truest, and knightliest of all the great American citizens, who ever stood up in the high places of the Government (applause) with eloquent tongue, in defence of constitutional rights and human freedom.

Such, my fellow-countrymen, is our good fortune to-day, and I now introduce him to you, ladies and gentlemen, as worthy of all the honor and all the respect which you can bestow upon him, in the person of Thomas F. Bayard. (Long and continued applause.)

BAYARD'S SPEECH.

Ladies and Gentlemen; My Fellow-Countrymen: If I were to follow the dictates of my own feelings at this moment, I should cast this manuscript to the winds; I would speak under the inspiration of this place and of this people. (Applause.) It would be to me a relief to pour forth my heart to you in unpremeditated strains of gratitude to God, that the spirit of liberty yet so dwells and is felt by every man, woman and child, within the sound of my voice. But I came not to give utterance to mere feeling. I came, so far as I was able, to gather the time from the varied and engrossing occupations of an American legislator, to express to you, not sudden emotions, but the deliberate recital and examination of the great facts here wrought, more than a century ago, and the vitality of which brings us here again together to-day, and will bring our posterity for many a generation in the long years to come. (Applause.)

In a season of doubt and danger, when the spirit of liberty was "hawked

at" by the talons of autocratic power; when the very air was filled with apprehension and uncertainty, and the upraised hand of the tyrant put every man in peril; when the question was: "Who shall bell the cat?" A little band of men in a remote and inland county of North Carolina, were found willing to take the risk,—to set their lives upon the hazard of the die;—who

"Freeman stand or,
"Freeman fa!"—

were first found ready

"Freedom's sword to strongly draw."

Who, whether they pledged "their lives, their fortunes and their most sacred honor" to maintain their independence from the Crown of Great Britain, and to the success of the cause of American Liberty, on the 20th, or on the 31st of May, 1775, without doubt did so in that month;—and who, when they did, stepped in advance of their fellow-colonists to do it, at a time when

"Those behind cried 'Forward!'
And those in front cried 'back!'"

The Spartan mother said to her son—"If your sword is short, add a step to it"—and the men of Mecklenburg added that step, and went down into the dread arena of life or death for liberty, gravely, quietly, and steadily.

And because they did so, we have assembled to-day with uncovered heads and reverential hearts to do honor to their memory;—to recall their deeds, refresh our spirits, and re-invigorate our purposes, by draughts from the clear spring of their simple and noble example.

And who were these men,—this untitled nobility of homespun?

It was not amid the blare of trumpets, or surrounded by the pomp and circumstance of wealth and power, that the grave and deliberate action of the men of the county of Mecklenburg was

taken 107 years ago. The importance of the step lay in the great principle of political liberty which it asserted, and its success was due to the steady force of conscientious conviction which animated the men who proclaimed it, and which dignifies their memories for all time.

In May, 1775, Charlotte was a very small town, in fact a little village of twenty small dwelling houses, surrounded by the scattered habitations of an agricultural and pastoral community.

Charlotte had been chosen as the seat of the Presbyterian college which the Legislature of North Carolina had chartered, but which charter the King had disallowed. It was the centre of culture of that part of the province; and Ephraim Brevard, the draughtsman of the "Declaration" had been educated at Princeton, New Jersey.

The men who led that colony to America had evidently read and profited by the warning of my Lord Bacon, when in his essay on "Plantations" he had told them:

"It is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of evil and wicked and degraded men to be the people with whom you plant; and not only so, but it spoileth the plantation, and they ever live like rogues and not fall to work, but be lazy and do mischief and spend victuals, and be quickly weary, and then certify over to their country to the discredit of the plantation."

Such as these were unknown in that settlement. Probably not an individual among those inhabitants but who was compelled to rely in greater or less degree upon manual labor for his support, and in rural simplicity—

"Along the cool sequestered vale of life,
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."

It is worth while to note the origin

and stock from which these forefathers of Mecklenburg sprung.

They were nearly all of Scotch-Irish descent, and were the children of those hardy pioneers who left the north of Ireland early in the 18th century and came to America. The main column came up the Delaware bay and river, and passing over to the Cumberland valley from Philadelphia, following that valley in its Southerly sweep, made their homes in North Carolina.

History tells us that these immigrants dwelt for some years on the banks of the Delaware, and some of their family names remain there yet, accompanied by honor and respect—the Polks, Pattons, Morrisons, Alexanders and others; and, it is not therefore altogether inappropriate, that after the lapse of many generations, a man, whose forefathers tarried longer on the banks of the Delaware, and whose home is still there, should make his pilgrimage hither and join with you in reviving memories of a glory common to us all.

For I confess to you, fellow countrymen, the glories of our Union are those I value most. I am not insensible to local ties, and I feel as much as any, the sense of *home*—in the spot where I was born—but when a theme is found and a chorus is raised in which all of our countrymen can join, and a thrill runs from the Lakes to the Gulf, and vibrates along our 13,000 miles of sea coast—when a song is sung, of which every American knows the words, to which every American foot keeps step, and of which every heart beats the measure—then I feel most the true strength and power and worth of American citizenship.

As akin to this thought I copied the other day, from the inscription upon an engraving of Judge Andrew Pickens

Butler of South Carolina, the former United States Senator from that State, (whose kinsman and successor so well and honorably fills his place, and by whose presence here to-day, as well as that of his distinguished colleague, we all are gratified,) the following sentence, which was selected from a speech of Judge Butler, made long before the civil war, by one of his colleagues in the Senate (my honored father) as descriptive of Butler's sentiment and character:

"How it has happened I cannot tell, but from some cause—not certainly deserved—Massachusetts and South Carolina have been made to take opposite positions in Federal politics; nay, more, to be made ostensibly bitter adversaries. If I knew at this moment that all political connection was to cease between the North and the South, I would, as a matter of choice, hang up in my parlor the portraits of such men as Adams, Hancock and Sherman, and they would be full of historical instruction; one lesson they especially teach, never to submit to a wrongful and oppressive exercise of authority. Diomedes was the youngest hero at the siege of Troy. His courage was marked by promptness and intrepidity and compared well with the sagacious and perhaps selfish courage of Ulysses. Georgia was the youngest sister of the thirteen. She had made her pledge in the spirit of Diomedes. And, sir, she will with her sisters maintain her motto: Equality or Independence."

None of these hardy colonists of Mecklenburg would seem to have been men of rank, or to have been the descendants of men of rank. They were of the sturdy, hard-working, middle class. When their ancestors had been forced from Scotland by the destruction of their land tenures, and had proudly refused to seek their "sheepskins" from manorial lords, and could

no longer maintain the tenures which from time immemorial had been their right, they crossed the narrow sea and settled in the north of Ireland in the "Kingdom of Ulster."

There again after a century of struggle and unrest, they found themselves the victims of renewed dislocations of the tenure of their lands, and wearying of the uncertainties, and unsubmitive to the caprice of arbitrary rulers, they made their way across the broad Atlantic to a new country, where the right to property should have security and stability, and where the fruits of honest labor could be transmitted to their posterity.

The school in which they had been trained was that of adversity. No one can read their public declarations, their resolves, their State papers, bills of rights and constitutions promulgated here in North Carolina, without catching the echo of Magna Charta, and every hard won battle for civil and religious liberty in the long history of England.

Who did not recognize in the resolutions of Mecklenburg of May, 1775, as read by our honored friend Senator Ransom, the spirit and almost the words themselves of the great charter, forced from the unwilling hand of a treacherous and tyrannical king by the barons who camped upon the field of Runnymede in June, 1215.

Magna Charta was itself but a revival of still more ancient laws and charters extorted by persistent liberty from unwilling power.

What more did the men of Mecklenburg demand a hundred years ago, than was asked at Runnymede nearly seven centuries before? What was asked by them then, that we do not ask to-day, and which it behooves us to see is not withheld to-day?

"That no freeman shall be seized or imprisoned or dispossessed, or outlawed,

or in any degree brought to ruin.

"That no man shall be pursued except by the legal judgment of his peers, or by the laws of the land.

"That justice and right shall neither be sold nor denied, nor delayed to any man."

And then mindful that a pure and independent judiciary is essential to every man's safety, it declared :

"That judges of assize were to make regular circuits four times a year.

"That justiciaries were to be chosen from among *men well versed in law*.

"That royal officers were not to hold pleas.

"That royal Heralds were not to bring men to trial for their own pleasure, nor without credible witnesses."

Here we have the germs of the great principle, that the administration of justice is to be independent of the political administration. No matter whether it be King or Congress, whether it be President or Parliament, the independence and separation of judicial from political power is an essential that can never be lost sight of—whether in England in the 13th century, in North Carolina in the 18th century, or in South Carolina in the 19th century.

The Declaration and Resolves which Gen. Ransom has just read to us, were carried to the first Provincial Congress of North Carolina, and on April 12th, 1776, that Congress unanimously adopted this resolution :

Resolved, That the delegates for this colony in the Continental Congress, be empowered to concur with the delegates of other colonies in *declaring independence*, and forming foreign alliances; reserving to this colony the sole and exclusive right of forming a constitution and laws for this colony, and of appointing delegates from time to time, under the direction of the Gener-

al Representative Assembly thereof, to meet the delegates of other colonies."

Here we see, the men of Mecklenburg, having quickened the feeling and the vision of the Provincial Congress of their own State, sending an electric spark still further on into the councils of the Confederate colonies.

Let the mists and vapors of time be dense as they may—let ignorance or envy raise what doubts they may as to the precise date of the original action of the men of Mecklenburg; of this fact *there is no doubt*; of this fact there can be no contradiction, none so foolhardy as to make it; that the resolution which I have just read to you preceded the National Declaration of Independence nearly three months. It is also one month older than the action of the Virginia Provincial Congress, which also recommended a declaration of National Independence.

These facts leave the men of Mecklenburg and the State of North Carolina the admitted leaders of the United Colonies in the great march of American Independence.

Well might John Adams write to Thomas Jefferson in June, 1819, when these papers seemed first to have met his eye:

"You know that if I had possessed it I would have made the halls of Congress to echo and re-echo with it fifteen months before your Declaration of Independence. What a poor, ignorant, malicious, short-sighted, crapulous mass is Tom Paine's Common Sense, in comparison with this paper. Had I known it, I would have commented upon it from the day you entered Congress until the 4th of July, 1776.

"The genuine sense of America at this moment was never so well expressed before, nor since. Richard Caswell, William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, the then

representatives of North Carolina in Congress, you know as well as I; and you know that the unanimity of the States finally depended upon the vote of Joseph Hewes, and was finally determined by him; and yet, history is to ascribe American revolution to Thomas Paine! *Sat verbum sapienti.*"

Therefore, fellow-citizens, it seems to me a matter of little importance, whether it was on the 20th day of May or on the 31st day of May, 1775, that the paper was prepared by Ephraim Brevard, and signed by Abraham Alexander as chairman and John McKnitt Alexander as secretary, and their 25 associates; suffice it to say, it will stand forever as a monument of the dignity of humanity, all the more impressive in its moral force and elevation, because of the total absence of that pomp of circumstance with which the stage managers of history so often seek to surround their action.

The first step in the work of English colonization in America was the voyage of Amadas and Barlow, Lieutenants of Sir Walter Raleigh, who, under the charter of Elizabeth, commenced the voyage which terminated at Roanoke Island in 1584.

There is not one in the great sisterhood of States who has earlier record, or one richer in interest, or more honorable in its facts than North Carolina, from the days when its great founder united his name and mournful history with her own, although he was fated never to see the colony or the city in which so much of his hopes and pride were centered.

In no spirit of reproach, but in the earnest suggestion of friendship, let me to-day impress upon you who hear me, the need and duty of preserving and perpetuating home chronicles. To use the language of my beloved preceptor,

that distinguished son of North Carolina, Francis L. Hawks:

"The attempt to preserve the story of their childhood's home is the duty of every American."

The glory of our common country belongs to us all; it is built up by the contributions of each part, and in no spirit of detraction would I remark upon the habit of our brethren of New England of allowing no occasion and no opportunity to hide under a bushel the light of their local history. On the contrary I praise and commend them for their activity in having forced to the front the claims of Massachusetts, to be considered the leading spirit in the great struggle that led to the independence of the United Colonies. But while withholding nothing of due acknowledgement from the courage, spirit and self-sacrifice of the men of New England in "the times that tried men's souls," I do make claim for at least an equal co-operative share in the great work, for their fellow colonists whose homes lay further South.

It was on the 16th of December, 1773, that the famous "tea party" of Boston took place; which, according to New England chroniclers, would seem the great revolutionary landmark of spirited popular uprising against tyranny. The lustre of this event is so brilliant in their minds as to pale the ineffectual fires of the struggling colonists elsewhere.

But let it not be forgotten that more than eight years prior to that date, early in 1765, when His Majesty's sloop of war "Defiance" arrived in Cape Fear River, having on board stamped paper for use in this colony, that a body of citizens, headed by Col. John Ashe and Col. Hugh Waddell boarded the vessel; took from her the paper and, in one of her own boats, conveyed it to the shore; and they compelled Houston, the royal

stamp master for North Carolina, then an inmate of the official family of Gov. Tryon, to go before the citizens and take a solemn oath not to attempt to execute his office.

This was, so far as my readings of the history of that period have gone, the first, the most spirited and defiant act to be found in the records.

The city of Philadelphia commenced opposition to the shipments of tea before the city of Boston, and in October, 1773 learning the arrival of two vessels laden with tea, a committee of her citizens in pursuance of prior public resolves went down the River Delaware as far as the town of Chester, boarded the vessels lying there in the stream, ordered them back to England, and their command was obeyed. At the same time the agents of the East India Company were compelled to resign their positions. After this, we are told by the historian (Bancroft,) Boston "adopted the Philadelphia Resolves."

In New York every preparation was made in November 1773 to prevent the landing of any tea, and grievous was the disappointment of those people that the tea ships failed to appear in their harbor. And in April 1774 tea-chests were in open daylight tumbled into the dock from the decks of the ships that came in.

In Charleston, South Carolina, on December 2d, 1773 the consignees of a cargo of tea resigned, the tax was refused, and the collector of the port was obliged to store it in cellars where it lay until it rotted.

Then followed the destruction of the tea in Boston harbor.—When, after a vast public meeting held on the night of December 16, 1773, a body of 40 or 50 men, all of whom were disguised as Indians, "having posted guards to prevent the intrusion of spies," proceeded on board the ship "Dartmouth" lying

at the wharf, and threw overboard her cargo of tea.

The Province of Maryland made its early and vigorous contributions to this honorable history.

In June 1774, it resolved on a cessation of intercourse with the mother country, and passed resolutions breathing a spirit of the most determined resistance to tyranny. A subscription was made for the relief of Boston,—whose port had just been closed by the order of Lord North,—and they declared that Maryland would break off all trade or dealing with any colony, province or town, that refused to come into the common league.

The brigantine "Mary Jane" having tea on board consigned to parties in Georgetown and Bladensburg, arrived in St. Mary's River. Instantly the committee of Charles county summoned the master and consignee before them. They explained that the duty had not been paid, and pledged themselves that the tea should be sent back to London. With this apology, coupled with the instant return of the vessel with the tea on board, the committee were satisfied.

In October 1774, the brig "Peggy Stewart" arrived at Annapolis, having on board a few packages of tea, the duty having been paid by Mr. Stewart, whereupon a public meeting was called, and great excitement ensued, in which the life of Mr. Stewart was put in great danger.

By the interposition of Charles Carroll, of Carrollton, Governor Pace, and others, the people were induced to accept an apology from Mr. Stewart, coupled with his offer to destroy with his own hand, the obnoxious vessel and the "detestable weed" as it was called in the language of the day. Accordingly the ship was run aground at Windmill Point, at the mouth of the Severn river, fired by the hand of her owner,

and utterly destroyed, in the presence of 5,000 people who lined the banks.

At Hagerstown in Maryland, about the same time, one John Parks was compelled to walk bare-headed to the market-place, bearing lighted candles in his hand, and there destroy certain boxes of his own tea upon which the tax had been paid.

These acts it will be observed were not committed by disguised men, nor by night; but openly in the face of day, by men well known to the royal authorities, and who did not flinch from any of the consequences of their bold deeds.

Let us therefore, when we commemorate the spirited act of our brethren of Massachusetts, not forget the even more spirited act of their coadjutors in the South and who have been less careful to place upon record those facts, in which to-day all Americans avow their pride.

Do you not agree with me therefore that it is well worth while, nay, that it is an obvious duty, that local historical societies should be instituted, into which contributions of records, correspondence, all the material relating to interesting periods in our history as a people, should be carefully gathered?

It is delightful to observe in the history of that early day how little trace of local jealousy exhibited itself, how "None were for faction and all for the State." When the port of Boston was closed by Lord North's act, Charleston in South Carolina, was the first to minister to the wants of Boston and sent early in June, 1774, 200 barrels of rice, promising 800 more. Wilmington, in North Carolina raised and sent promptly £2000 in currency. Delaware devised plans for regular and systematic relief. Maryland and Virginia gave liberally from their store; the great Washington himself heading the subscription list with £50, saying:

"We are not contending against paying the duty of three pence on tea; it is the right, only, to lay the tax we dispute."

It is a pleasant thing, I say, to observe the words of cheer and brotherhood that ran all along the Atlantic coast, and made the cause of Boston the cause of the United Colonies.

Can you not picture to yourselves how, on a pleasant day in May, 107 years ago, where we stand to-day, little groups of plain and earnest citizens were discussing the progress of this approaching collision between them and their distant and ignorant ruler, who was seeking by unwise laws to compel their submission to a principle repugnant to common good and self-respect; who, forgetting they were loving subjects, sought to make them his abject slaves? Engaged in such themes as these, a horseman is described in the distance urging his weary steed towards them; travel-stained and dusty, and with troubled face, he recites the news of Lexington and Concord, and the blood of their distant countrymen shed in the cause of Liberty.

The spark has been struck; the flame has been kindled; and higher and higher it mounts to the sky, destined in its conflagration to destroy the last remnant of British power in the United Colonies.

Then it was that the spirit of Magna Charta was revived. Then it was that every lesson embodied in English history came to mind. In such a time, amid such memories, the words of the Declaration of Mecklenburg were framed; and can you not hear to-day the deep, strong voice of Col. Thomas Polk, as he stood at the little courthouse door, and read aloud to the assembly the Declaration we have again heard to-day? And Graham, and Rhees, and Kennedy, and Davidson, and Mor-

rierson, and Barry, were the committee to transmit copies to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. And Col. Thomas Polk and Dr. Joseph Kennedy, were appointed a committee to purchase powder and flints and ball for use by the militia of Mecklenburg county.

The men of that day knew the value of the militia. They had declared:

"That all able-bodied men in the State should be trained for its defence under such regulations, restrictions and exceptions as the General Assembly should direct by law."

They knew then, as we know now, that the art of true obedience is the best guide to the art of true command, and that while learning to obey, men best become fitted to rule, that men comprehend how to rule, when they have learned how to be ruled.

They recognized the truth of what old Sam Johnson said of courage—"which," said he, "is reckoned the greatest of all virtues, because, unless a man has that virtue he has no security for preserving any other."

Solon said to Cræsus when in ostentation he showed him his gold: "Sir, if any other come that hath better iron than you he will be master of all this gold." Therefore, said my Lord Bacon, "Let any prince or State think soberly of his forces except his militia of natives be of good and valiant soldiers."

It cannot be said, fellow-citizens, that the people of Mecklenburg, or indeed of North Carolina, ever exhibited a taste for peace without honor. They seem ever to have been restless under oppression, unhappy when suspicious that their rights were to be infringed. The name of the "Hornets' Nest" was not misapplied to this locality, and those who rudely disturbed it were apt to discover the truth of the simile.

In the month of May, 1771, the battle

of the Alamance proved to the Royal Governor Tryon that the Regulators of the county which now bears that name, were a people not to be bullied or scared out of their rights; and I myself have knowledge of how history repeated itself precisely one hundred years later, when another Governor, Holden by name, sought by the same means employed by Tryon to repress by brutal force, social and political disturbance in the same counties, and met with the same success. The history of this last campaign can be read in the testimony and reports of May, 1871, to the Congress of the United States.

And as—

"Now after ages of sorrow and wrong

* * * * *

The lark still carols the selfsame song
As she did to the uncured Adam."

So to the human heart the song of the passions continues, and it is the same as it was when its first owners found themselves *outside* the Garden of Eden. It is beset with the same seductions, and is as weak to resist as ever.

The men who founded the civilization of this country were especially endowed with the attributes needful for the work, and their records written not merely in words, but emblazoned on the very face of nature herself, here and all around us, speak to-day in the contrasts in physical fact between the days of 1776 and 1876.

They were hard-working and industrious, because the struggle for subsistence compelled them to be so; they were temperate, hardy, resolute and watchful, because without such qualities they could not have sustained themselves in a remote and wild country, in the neighborhood of superior numbers of savage and crafty Indians. And underlying all, they came here to their life-work, with intellects educated to the comprehension of the true prin-

ciples of civil and religious liberty, and they were animated by convictions which were based in the conscience, and illuminated by the rays of a divinely revealed religion. Under such sanctions and conditions, moral and intellectual, they laid the foundations of this great State.

And has human nature changed? Have the dangers and temptations which beset it, all passed away? and have we the inheritors of a fertile soil, discovered by their enterprise and redeemed by their industry and valor from savagery, and of institutes of free government framed and established by their learning and ability, and sealed with their life blood: Have we nothing more to do than to receive and to enjoy?

Is our lot one of easy, placid enjoyment?

Is there no longer need for the exhibition and active practice of the same virtues that founded and established free government, in order to continue and maintain it?

Are truthfulness, courage, fortitude, self-denial, industry and unselfishness become obsolete and useless, in our new conditions of modern life, with all its luxuries, comforts conveniences, and countless inventions?

In other words, has human nature changed, or have its manifestations only changed in name, in form, in number, but not in its reality.

My fellow countrymen! Our work of to-day calls upon us to be just as watchful, just as prompt, just as resolute in defence of our rights and our welfare, as it did the men in homespun who, in this town of Charlotte and county of Mecklenburg, assembled to make their solemn, single handed declaration of independence of tyranny and misrule 107 years ago.

It is true the manual labor which

then attached itself in a greater or less degree to every station in society has, by the invention of machinery and the sub-division of pursuits, been lessened, but is less industry, and other kinds of labor than with the hands, less requisite, or is it not more than necessary to respond to the present requirements of society as now organized?

It is true the farmer can now go to his distant field without his rifle, and free from danger of the arrow or bullet of his Indian foe. But because his agricultural machinery surrounds him, is his need of watchful industry the less, to enable him profitably to compete with his rivals in the market?

No; no; we have changed the forms, but we have not altered the reality.

The same blue sky, the same green earth, the same breezes, the same rains, the same Nature surrounds us to-day, and finds us the same human creatures as those upon whom the sun shone down a century ago in this very spot—notwithstanding the fact that Charlotte is no longer a straggling village but a beautiful and flourishing city.

Courage is as much needed now as ever in our daily lives. Its tests are varied, and we are not called so often to face a violent death, or serious personal pain or danger, because the spirit of force is differently manifested and is more regulated by the operation of the spirit of law.

Instances of personal intrepidity in battle and conflict, are countless in the chronicles and traditions of the colonists, who made the Atlantic sea-board a continuous battle-field from 1776 to 1782—but none touch me more than an exhibition of our own time.

But a little while ago a deadly fever ravaged the communities in our southwestern border, and all along the valley of the Mississippi rose the wail of

sorrow and the cry for help! And at such a time were there no knights-errant—no leaders of the forlorn hope?

The hospital records will show how young men, trained in the cure of sick bodies, and others in the cure of sad hearts and sick souls, pale students of the healing art, left their homes in the North, where dwelt health and happiness, and, with unfaltering step, went down to scenes of suffering and high duty, soon alas! to be the scene of their own death. As they fell in the ranks, their places were rapidly filled, and surely "The noble army of martyrs," never had a more ready or splendid body of recruits than the quiet gentlemen who died in 1878, in their endeavor to comfort and save their stricken fellow-countrymen.

But are there not other fevers to be cured? Is there not a fever of avaricious and pecuniary gain? Is there not the consuming fire of personal and political ambition, filling the breasts of men and urging them to gratify its demands at the cost of all considerations of delicacy, virtue and a generous sense of public welfare?

Are there not local jealousies, sectional animosities, tempting men to narrow and unpatriotic action?

In short, is not the sense of narrow personal aggrandizement—the desire to procure personal advancement and distinction, to reach place and power in politics, to-day threatening the welfare, the honor, and the credit of North Carolina, as dangerously as ever did British oppression or Indian warfare in May, 1775? And must not these foes of North Carolina of to-day be met and overthrown by the exercise of the same virtues that saved her a century ago?

Gentlemen! The enemy comes in a different shape; he wears a different garb, but the evil intent is the same.

For what did your forefathers struggle and bleed and die? For a free government of laws, and not of men; to prevent the rights of property and person from falling into untrustworthy and unfriendly hands.

At one time kingly oppression sought to take from them their rights and liberties by force,—to-day you are solicited and tempted by personal and partizan selfishness, and undermined rather than openly overthrown.

There is ever a struggle of forces going on in society between those that would destroy and those that would preserve it. Selfishness and corruption are all the time making combinations with ignorance and credulity, to obtain public power for other than public uses.

The form in which robbery is accomplished makes no difference to the victim; ruin can be brought upon a country by false interpretations of its constitution, or under the pretences of legislation; while a corrupt and vicious administration of any government, however wise its form, will wholly defeat and overthrow the real objects of all government—the care of property and person—as completely as a hostile army sword in hand, could openly do the evil work.

And when it becomes plain that the public welfare is imperilled, a true man's duty is the same under all circumstances, simply to do his best to save and protect it, and in performing this duty the class of virtues brought into exercise are always the same.

If open, violent war assails his government and people, he will not only reject all offers of rank and pay, all temptations of the false ambitions which the enemy may offer—but he will go at once into the service of his country in just such capacity as he is en-

abled, but serve her he will, either in high rank, or in the ranks.

If public safety, and the honor and welfare of his State is assailed by a political foe;—if profligate self-seekers combine to capture the legislative and other powers, and the weapons employed are those of corruption, combined with ignorance and vice,—he must shun all such contaminating alliances, and spurn all offers of power, place or fortune to be acquired at the cost of the welfare and reputation of his State and the respect of the good and true.

He must steadily maintain the organization which he believes will guard the public councils from the presence and intrusion of the venal, ignorant and incompetent; he will sedulously maintain upon the bench, learning, purity and justice, and bestow executive power in honest, intelligent and trustworthy hands. By his vote and efforts he will prove himself the unselfish, steady soldier of North Carolina, on the same principles and under as many trials and difficulties as the men of Mecklenburg of 1775.

There is courage especially required at this day in the United States of as high a type as any hitherto exhibited in our history. I mean the courage to proclaim and maintain opinions and convictions upon public questions, which are in opposition to temporary public clamor. To stand by the truth, until the sober second thought of the people shall come—as it always ultimately will—to its rescue.

There are hundreds of men who would risk their lives in the heat of battle, who will not vote or speak, even upon the most important public questions, in a way that they believe would subject them to the disapproval of a majority of their fellow-citizens. They have not, in short, the same spirit of conscientious independence and public devotion

which breathed in the Declaration of Mecklenburg in May, 1775, and was caught up and reiterated by all the colonies in chorus on the 4th of July, a year and two months later.

The Mecklenburg men pledged “their lives, their fortunes, and their most sacred honor” to the cause of liberty and independence. It cost them severely afterwards to keep that pledge, *but they did it.*

And I am persuaded that the one thing the politics of the United States needs, and will always need (and which is needed by every people, no matter under what form of government they may live) is the same spirit of noble courage, to assert an independent conviction of the truth, in any and every essential question affecting the welfare, the honor and happiness of our country.

It is true, we have prohibited the grant of any title of nobility by a State or by the United States; but a system of practical politics that tends to prohibit great men and noble men, as well as titles, will end in giving power to a set of political spoilers and parasites, who, in that hour of trial, which must come to every country, will prove their total want of those conscientious, manly, self-respecting qualities, which make men faithful friends and safe counselors in private life, and trustworthy and patriotic public servants.

It lies in public opinion to reward or punish, to encourage or discourage, these qualities which make the true corner stone of good government, whatever may be its form.

We train up our children to look back to the patriotic examples of the men who, with truth in their hearts and courage on their foreheads, steadily in the face of the frowns of power and the seductions of ease and gain, served their country unselfishly, and secured its gov-

ernment on the foundations of virtue and honor.

Such traditions are of untold value to a people; they are a treasure which grows with its use; they give a tone of character; they create a moral atmosphere which permeates every branch of their government and strengthens every institution.

If we would create such memories for posterity, let us create such hopes for the living; let us encourage the actors in public events of our own day and generation to feel that—"last infirmity of noble mind"—the ambition to live in the memory of a grateful people.

In the generation of such a public spirit, the baser passions of politics will be rebuked and discredited; so that time-serving and petty self-seeking will give place to a nobler solicitude for the public welfare; and in which the elements of an enduring and real national greatness will be found.

When John of England, with knitted brow and trembling hand set his seal at Runnymede to the Great Charter, he was "girt with many a Baron bold" who stripped him of undue powers inimical to the safety, honor and self respect of free-born Englishmen, and what the Barons gained that day for themselves they could not keep from all other classes of their countrymen.

The Federal Constitution is our Magna Charta; it contains every principle for which freedom struggled in England, through the nine centuries, from the Saxon Alfred to George the Third; and additional checks upon governmental power, and safeguards to individuals and minorities were placed in its provisions.

The Mecklenburg Declaration was the first clarion note heard among the mountains of North Carolina, whose echo reverberated through the Provincial Congress of this State, until it

reached the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, and ended only in the Federal Constitution of the great Union of States.

"Cervantes smiled Spain's Chivalry away."

said Lord Byron;—and Burke nearly a century ago despairingly declared:

"The age of chivalry has gone; that of sophists, economists, and calculators has succeeded."

As an *institution* this is true, but as to that which created chivalry, it is surely untrue, and never will be true;—for it was not the helmet, nor shield, nor corslet, nor lance, nor spurs, that made the true knight;—but the brave heart, the dauntless will, the unselfish and gentle soul that lay within his breast. The plain attire, the homespun garb may cover—nay *does* cover to-day, all that made chivalry, first the precursor, and at last the hand-maid of religion and law.

Sir Walter Raleigh landed his expeditions on your shores three hundred years ago, and his name is linked with the capital of the State—whose soil he was destined never to see.

History tells us how he gained favor with the Virgin Queen of England by casting his costly and embroidered mantle before her in the mire, that she might pass dry shod. In this lofty courtesy he typified the dignity of unhesitating service to his lawful ruler.

And because we are citizens of a Republic, is there nothing to which we owe unhesitating service? Is there no cause in which we would as willingly throw down our cloak, and if need be go down with it? Is not Queen Carolina as worthy of devotion as Queen Elizabeth? and are not the men of Carolina as devoted to the cause of her safety, honor and welfare?

Filled with such a sentiment, how infinitely poor and small become the

tradings and hucksterings of patronage and petty politics! How much better and nobler and wiser, to be true to the fortunes of a grand old commonwealth, than to see them endangered at the behests of selfish and self-seeking personal ambition.

Our dangers to-day are not from a savage and treacherous foe, whose scalping-knife and keen arrow were the dread of our forefathers; nor a tyrannical ruler across the sea in all the bigotry of power, seeking to oppress and strangle freedom. But evils and dangers arising from a false arrangement of the forces of our government threaten us on every side.

We must recur to the fundamental principles upon which liberty was founded, and which must be revived, if liberty is to be maintained.

It was in the balance of its forces that the equilibrium of free society was found. Each force needs recognition and in the distribution and diffusion of power safety was found. Observing this rule powers were not suffered to accumulate.—Not being consolidated men of moderate abilities were enabled to execute them.—No governing class was created, and it was never intended to have a privileged class. Property was to be made secure by law and to have its due weight, but the political power of wealth, or plutocracy was never to be permitted. Numbers were to have weight, but the whole arrangement of our government, showed the principle of absolute numerical majority was never admitted, but, on the contrary rendered impossible in every department.

Elections were made frequent, for the purpose of bringing the holders of official power, back to the people at stated periods, to receive judgment upon their administration;—but whoever contem-

plated that which we now see of every engine of public power?

Legislative, executive and judicial, all lent to prolong the term of power, and prevent a change or reformation of administration.

Nearly a century and a half ago, an English statute, punished by heavy fine the solicitation of a vote by an officer of the government, for, said Blackstone:

"To use the offices of society to control society, what is this but to cut up government by its very roots."

And yet here in the United States to-day, the official who does not actively exercise his powers, and use his salary and influence to prolong party power, is deprived of his office for that reason. Do not men sit openly in public to receive involuntary contributions from the civil officers of the government, just as regularly as the collector of lawful taxes? Are not thanks publicly rendered by men high in station, for the debauchery of a canvass and overthrow of the free elections in a great State?

The campaign of to-day is against the allied armies of greed and corruption, combining with ignorance and corruptibility, to use the powers of the government for personal and party ends. The weapons to be used in opposition to these forces, are education, moral and intellectual, conscience and dignity, appealing to all that is best in men's natures to preserve those things which are most essential to their welfare.

And now, my countrymen, my part in the commemoration of the Declaration of Independence by the freemen of Mecklenburg county has been performed. No one is more conscious than I of the imperfect manner in which the duty assigned me has been executed, for when I yielded to the friendly influence

of your invitation, I confess I did not sufficiently weigh the difficulties of the attempt to reconcile the demands of legislative duties with the preparation of such an address.

When again I shall see the good people of Mecklenburg county I know not, but I cannot forbear the wish, that from the rich quarries of the old North State, marble and granite will be found with which to build a fitting monument to the simple and heroic men, to commemorate whose deeds we have here to-day assembled.

Surely as Timrod, the sweet poet of

South Carolina, has sung:

"Somewhere waiting for its birth
The shaft lies in the stone."

The time has come when the shaft should rise, and be inscribed with the names of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and hither shall be led the youth of this and later generations yet unborn, to learn the lesson how men should live and die for their country.

To the dead I have paid my tribute of respect and honor; to the living I have tendered the earnest and affectionate counsel of a friend;—and my task is done.

10/1/05



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